

**WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION:  
PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS IN SOUTHERN  
ALBERTA**

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this project to Ken Fisher, a principal who saw leadership potential in me long before I did and fostered it with his gentle and kind spirit.

## **Abstract**

Female educational administrators continue to be much less visible than their male counterparts in similar positions. The number of women serving in administrative roles is not proportionate to the number of women in the teaching profession. This paper examines the history of women in administration, the obstacles that some women face, and some proposed solutions to remedy this gender imbalance. Much of the literature relative to this topic focuses on the barriers that many women face and the reasons that these barriers exist. This paper outlines the results of twenty women's responses on a fifteen-item questionnaire, and analyzes the themes within their answers. All of the women are from one school jurisdiction in Alberta, Canada. The study finds that not many women in this particular district encountered barriers that prevented them from reaching their administrative goals for long. It also finds that the women questioned believe there has been much progress made in correcting the imbalance of women in administration in their district. It is hoped that when others read this project they will become more aware of the issues that women face in their administrative careers, both in acquiring the job and in working at it on a daily basis. It is also hoped that other female administrators, or aspiring administrators, who read this paper will feel more comfortable in who they are as they work towards their goal. May current and future female administrators find comfort in the knowledge that what they are feeling or experiencing perhaps have been felt and experienced by those of us who have come before them.

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Thank you to my husband who has always believed in me and encouraged me to see beyond what I currently do and to dream about the future.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Women in administration... as a student growing up in a Southern Alberta public school district, I never knew any. I remember that the vast majority of the teachers in my elementary school were female, the teachers at my junior high school were both male and female and seemed fairly equal in numbers, and my senior high teachers were mainly males. But not in any school, in any of my twelve years in that district, was there ever a female principal or assistant principal.

“Females in educational administration” is a topic of special interest to me as I am now a female administrator in the district I grew up in. Throughout both my teaching and administrative career, I have wondered why such a seemingly disproportionate number of females are administrators compared to their numbers as teachers in the classrooms. Were there fewer women who actually wanted to be administrators or were they simply not being hired? These questions only seemed to spur me on to more. If there are not many women interested in becoming administrators, what keeps them from becoming interested? If they are not being hired, what barriers exist that are preventing women from achieving this goal? How can these barriers be broken? What motivates women to pursue administration? What qualities do women bring to their administrative teams that make them effective leaders? Are there differences in the numbers of female administrators at the varying levels of school as there seem to be with the numbers of male and female teachers? This “wondering” has led me to focus on females in educational

administration in my culminating project.

### Rationale for this Study

It seems that there are more females entering into positions of administration in the education system of the twenty-first century than ever before. But, according to the research, the balance in these positions still appears to be in the favour of males. By examining the causes of this imbalance and proposing solutions for them, I hope to provide those currently in leadership with many reasons to applaud and support women in their districts and encourage them to make their own voices heard in the area of educational administration. It is also my hope that, through my research and others' on this topic, that school boards and districts will examine their own policies and procedures with regard to the gender balance, or imbalance, that exists within their administrative teams.

I have a vested interest in the area of educational administration because of the fact that I am a female administrator who is a minority in her field. As a female educational administrator at the secondary level, I sometimes feel alone. There are few administrative colleagues at this level that are of the same sex, and I have often wondered why that is. I know of some issues of bias against women, such as internal factors, external factors, and androcentrism in the area of administration and, as a result, of the general difficulty women have in attaining jobs such as the one I have. I have read of many issues of bias in my research and heard it from the voices of men and women, alike.

In this project, I will examine statistical information with regards to the gender of administrative positions in Alberta, provide a summary of what the research claims are reasons for this imbalance, consider proposed solutions to remedy the imbalance, and share my own findings from a fifteen-item questionnaire of twenty female administrative respondents. On a personal level, I also wanted to collect perceptions about experiences and perceptions by my female counterparts to see if mine is a “typical” experience or not. I planned to examine the research to learn more about perceived obstacles many women face before becoming administrators, and compare them to the perceptions of other female administrators, including my own. I continue to be interested in comparing the researched facts with the responses of these women to my questions about women in administration.

#### Significance of the Project

It is my hope that when others read this project they will become more aware of the issues that women face in their administrative careers both in acquiring the job and in working at it on a daily basis. I also want other female administrators, or aspiring administrators, to read my project, and feel more comfortable in who they are as they work toward their goals. I hope that they will find comfort in the knowledge that what they are feeling or experiencing may have been felt and experienced by those of us who have come before them.

I feel honored to have been able to examine the stories, insights, and points of view that the women of this district shared with me. Examining this information has been a valuable experience, and I thank them for their honesty and vulnerability.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

*“Is there anything better in a state than that both men and women be rendered the very best? There is not.”* Plato [quote from Dr. Brian Titley’s course]

#### Introduction

It has been over 2000 years since Plato spoke and taught in favour of the education of women. Today’s society continues to struggle with how this will be achieved and what equality for both sexes looks like. Women continue to make up the majority of the workforce in nursing and elementary school teaching positions, just as in the late 1800’s, and remain under-represented in the administration of those professions. Aristotle, a man recognised as a forefather of democratic freedom and educational thought, unlike Plato, argued that a woman has no right to positions of leadership, “The male is by nature superior and the female inferior; the one rules and the other is ruled” (cited in Mahoney, 1993, p. 10). These two contrasting belief systems, as represented by Plato and Aristotle, continue to provide the foundation for the struggles women have as they strive to become equals with their male counterparts.

The most recent statistics are continuing to reveal old themes and numbers: women still make up the largest percentage in terms of teaching positions in our school systems, but the lowest percentage in terms of administrative positions. Some of the reasons for these low numbers include the ability (or lack thereof) of the candidate, responsibilities at home, lack of opportunities, few role models, district hiring practices, and other “barriers” such as circumstances or situations that prevent

or create difficulty for women attempting to become a school administrator. To see a dramatic change in these numbers, educators in all positions at every level need to be aware of the low numbers of women in certain positions and the possible reasons why this may be. Educators, districts, school boards, and administrators, then, need to take action to rectify and remove or dislodge these barriers.

Before examining the results of my study, it is important to review the historical and statistical perspectives and data (including within the province of Alberta), the various barriers women face when attempting advancement on the administrative ladder, and the proposed solutions for overcoming those barriers.

#### Historical and Statistical Perspectives

The years between 1900 and 1930 are sometimes referred to as a 'golden age' for women in school administration (Hansot & Tyak, cited in Shakeshaft, 1989). This was a time when it was believed that taking care of children, including educating them, was women's work, as it was considered to be an extension of mothering. As a result, there were many opportunities for women to become teachers and even administrators of schools. But as men became more involved in the teaching profession, especially after their return from World War II, women tended to remain in the classroom and out of the school office. "As schools began to evolve into hierarchical organisations, the majority of positions of formal leadership positions were occupied by men" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 30). This fact mirrors the then-commonly held belief that women were to be the nurturers of the children, and men, the managers of the schools (Whitaker & Lane in Storey & Zellinsky, 1993).

It has been argued that the male gender is privileged in our society (Brown, 1994). This patriarchy is a system in which the value of women and women's voices is obscured and diminished (Lerner, 1993 in Brown, 1994). Patriarchy can and does take many forms and generally serves to keep women in a place of subordination to men. Does this subordination manifest itself in educational administration? The next section outlines the statistics of women in administration in Alberta.

An under-representation of women was identified in the late 1960's and early 1970's in both the public and separate school systems of Alberta. Two reasons were cited for this. One was that women were simply being discriminated against, and the second was that not very many women applied for the available administrative positions (Cairns, 1977). In 1967 in Alberta, 54% of in-school personnel were women, but only 18% of in-school administrative positions were occupied by women. The female applicants had more education than the male applicants who were actually hired for the job. Furthermore, "...the more administrative responsibility attached to the position, the less probability that the position would be held by a woman" (Cairns, 1967, p. 166). In 1966 in Alberta, a man was 7.5 times more likely to become a principal than a woman even though he was only 2.5 times as likely to have higher qualifications than a woman (Nixon, 1972). The following table represents the statistical information on the percentage of women in administration in Alberta from 1968-1971 (Cairns, 1977).

**Table 1 Percentage of Women in Administration in Alberta, 1968 - 1971**

<b>POSITION</b>	1968-69	1969-70	1970-71
Teacher	93.4%	93.4%	94.1%
Principal	1.8%	1.4%	1.3%
Assistant Principal	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%

The Calgary Board of Education seemed to make some progress by the mid-70's as their numbers were higher in favour of women (Cairns, 1977). The article never specified the difference between "assistant" principals and "vice" principals, but, given their ranking order and the number of females occupying the positions, I would surmise that the "vice" principal holds fewer administrative duties than does the "assistant" principal. Because of the negative connotation of the word, "vice", the nomenclature of educational leadership positions shifted to "assistant" principal.

**Table 2 Percentage of Males and Females in Administration in Calgary, 1975**

<b>ELEMENTARY:</b>	<b>MALES</b>	<b>FEMALES</b>
Principal	82%	18%
Assistant Principal	51%	49%
Vice Principal	63%	37%
Team Leader	22%	78%
<b>JUNIOR HIGH:</b>		
Principal	100%	0%
Assistant Principal	100%	0%
Vice Principal	86%	14%
Team Leader	70%	30%
<b>SENIOR HIGH:</b>		
Principal	100%	0%
Assistant Principal	93%	7%
Department Head	90%	10%

Even in 1977, Cairns made note of the traditional roles that were still being held by women and how those roles were affecting the low numbers of women in administrative positions: "...changes in the traditional distribution of the work load associated with running a home and raising children are a necessary precondition to increasing applicants of women" (Cairns, 1977, p. 174).

Even in the year 2002, these "preconditions" to women moving into administration have changed little. Women are still seen as the ones who should be



at home with the children while the males continue to work and progress in their careers. Women are still entering into administrative positions later in their lives than men because they invest time at home with their children. It is a common perception, even among women (who have been socialised this way) that raising children is an enormous commitment and those who wish to be thoroughly involved with them “realise” that working outside of the home or attaining further schooling at the same time, results in a sacrifice.

The Department of Alberta Education (as it was then called) shared the following statistical information with the Alberta Teacher’s Association in 1996. It was published in a document titled, “Report on the Task Force on Women in Administration.” The percentages shown here are the representation of women occupying those positions for those school years. These numbers prove that a much larger percentage of administrative positions were becoming occupied by females as compared to 1968 – 1971.

**Table 3 Women in Administrative Positions in Alberta, 1990 - 1995**

<b>POSITION</b>	1990-91	1993-94	1994-95
Superintendent/Chief Deputy/Assistant	40%	21%	25%
Principal	18%	24%	26%
Assistant Principal	28%	35%	36%

In 1993-94, the Alberta government began its funding cuts and also restructured all of the school districts throughout the province. One possible explanation for the lower numbers in 1993, 1994, and 1995, is that women were

more involved as superintendents in the smaller districts that were amalgamated into the larger ones. It is also interesting to note that the researchers chose to combine the three positions of superintendent, chief deputy, and assistant superintendent into one statistic. I believe that if the three positions titles were left to represent themselves individually, the percentage of women occupying the superintendent's position would have been even lower than represented in table three.

In 1999, the Alberta Teacher's Association Magazine printed an article about the gains that women in Alberta have or have not made in the area of administration (Young & Ansara, 1999). A summary of those statistics are as follows.

**Table 4 Percentage of Males and Females in Administrative Positions in Alberta, 1996 - 1997**

<b>POSITION</b>	<b>MALES</b>	<b>FEMALES</b>
Superintendent	89.8%	10.2%
Assistant/Associate Superintendent	81.1%	18.9%
Elementary School Principal	56.5%	43.5%
Junior High School Principal	81.7%	18.3%
Senior High School Principal	81.7%	18.3%
Multi-Level School Principal	76.2%	23.8%
Elementary Assistant Principal	39.4%	60.6%
Junior High School Assistant Principal	61.0%	39.0%
Senior High School Assistant Principal	70.1%	29.9%
Multi-Level School Assistant Principal	66.1%	33.9%
Other Central Office Staff	40.9%	59.1%

The biggest gains made by women since 1975 are in the areas of junior and senior high principalships and assistant principalships. At the junior and senior high levels, an increase of 18.3% (from 0%) in principalships took a total of twenty-two years to accomplish. Given that women have waited hundreds of years to see more equality granted to them, twenty-two years seems to be a very short amount of time. The assistant principalships at these two levels also made serious gains with the junior high statistic increasing by 39% (from 0%), and the senior high increasing by 22% (from 7%). The authors of this article point out that more women are moving into these positions at a time when the positions are becoming more complex in managerial and political ways and the work itself is intensifying (Young & Ansara, 1999). These women, therefore, have an incredible challenge ahead of them at a time when there are not many same-sex colleagues to rely on for support or mentoring. As a result, there will be a continued perception that women will have to choose either to become *mothers* or to become *administrators*, as doing both jobs *well* is often seen as being next to impossible. The other option, of course, is for women to continue to enter administrative jobs much later in their lives and careers than men do, *after* their children are older.

The statistics make the gender imbalance very clear. Although gains have been made in the last thirty-five years for women entering into administrative positions, much progress is yet to be made for true equality to exist for women in the area of educational administration. Based on these statistics, it seems as though the “glass ceiling” (Gill, 1994) is still in effect and is preventing the upward movement of women into office positions in schools. At the same time, some researchers have

identified a “sunroof” effect where an opening in the ceiling (or “roof”) opens long and wide enough to allow a few women through (Pearman, 1999). An examination of the researchers’ findings on possible reasons for the low numbers, as well as possible solutions to rectify the problem, are presented in the next section.

### Barriers for Women

Many conclusions have been drawn about the barriers that keep women out of school administration. Some of these obstacles have to do with women’s choices while others are well beyond women’s control. These barriers include gender stereotyping, discrimination, biased hiring practices, the political nature of the job and socialisation (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Dotzler, 1996; Gupton, 1996; Mahoney, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989).

According to Slauenwhite and Skok (1991), three kinds of barriers exist that women must overcome in order to become administrators: internal factors (factors in women themselves, such as a lack of self confidence), external conditions (factors outside women’s control, like discrimination and sexual or occupational stereotypes), and androcentrism (a belief that women are just like men and function like them). Women have been conditioned by society not to pursue a higher education because they are told that they do not *need* it as much as men do and if they *do* decide to advance their learning, they have less financial support (Slauenwhite & Skok, 1991). Women also become critical of themselves if they cannot, or do not, spend the “prescribed” amount of time with their families and find themselves to be in a lose-lose situation. “To the extent that she is a good mother, she cannot rise in the corporate world; to the extent that she rises in the corporate world, she is seen as a

bad mother” (Kimmel, 2000:197). Because of the enormous and intense pressure administrators face, it is impossible to respond to all of the demands of raising a small child and filling the role of any administrative position at the same time (Marshall, 1985). Cairns said basically the same thing back in 1977.

External factors such as gender discrimination in hiring practices and organisational structure, dual work role expectations for married women and the hierarchical structure present in our school systems give women little hope in their aspirations in achieving a promotion and, as a result, are choosing other careers (Slauenwhite & Skok, 1991). Certain characteristics society believes about women also contribute to the external factors that limit women’s opportunities for advancement: women do not really want to work, they do not need the money and/or they have different aptitudes and interests (Kimmel, 2000).

Society holds certain expectations of women. Women are expected to be attractive, passive, pleasant, modest (Marshall, 1985), co-operative, nurturing, and dependent (Slauenwhite & Skok, 1991). These societal expectations could contribute to the belief that men manage the schools while the women nurture the learners – as in the traditional home (Whitaker & Lane in Storey & Zellinsky, 1993). It is difficult for women *not* to conform to these stereotypical expectations (Slauenwhits & Skok, 1991). But attaining an administrative position may cost them the perception of having these feminine characteristics because they “...often have to dress and act “masculine” in order to be taken seriously as [being] competent and capable” (Kimmel, 2000, p. 161).

A lack of female administrative role models is also a barrier (Kennington-Edson, 1988; Mahoney, 1993; Schmidt, 1995; Slauenwhite & Skok, 1991). With the larger number of men in administration, women have access to fewer role models to prove to them that the glass ceiling can be broken. More role models may encourage women to seriously consider administration as a career option and to not become so discouraged if they are unsuccessful the first time they apply.

Women are socialised to nurture and support others as they assume the traditional role of mother and caretaker of the home while men are socialised to persevere and seek professional success (Whitaker & Lane in Mahoney, 1993). “Both men and women frequently fail to see leadership potential in female educators because of the belief that authority roles might conflict with the primary commitment of all women – bearing and raising children” (Kennington-Edson, 1993). Women are socialised *not* to pursue a higher education since society tends to believe they do not require as high of an education as men (Mahoney, 1993). But in spite of this socialisation, many women *do* get their graduate degrees. However, during their course work at universities, women find that “the feminine voice and experience is still almost entirely silent [in] educational philosophy” (Liston, p. 355). Even though an increasing number of women hold graduate certificates or degrees that qualify them for administration, they lack administrative aspiration (Gupton, 1996). Riehl & Byrd (1997) found that women and men were equally as likely to have had training in administration but women were more likely to have advanced degrees in related fields. In spite of this education, female teachers were less likely to become administrators (Holloway, 2000).

A woman's family can be a barrier as she prepares to go into administration. A wife and/or mother who aspires to be an administrator may find a strain on her familial relationships as they compete with her job for her time and energy (Bascia & Young, 2001; Hicks, 1996; Kennington-Edson, 1988; Mahoney, 1993; Schmidt, 1995). Balancing the many commitments between a family and a career can cause high levels of stress for the female aspirant (Gupston, 1996). A woman's sense of guilt for not being the kind of mother and/or wife she and others expect her to be also rises as she attempts to balance her priorities (Nixon, 1972). Women also enter into their careers as teachers or administrators later in their lives because of their responsibilities to their family (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Slauenwhite and Skok, 1991).

According to a study called, "Go For It! Barriers to Women's Promotion in Education" released by the Federation of Women Teacher's Association of Ontario (FWTAO) in 1992, the top ten deterrents for women to be promoted into administrative positions are as follows:

- 1) family responsibilities at home
- 2) informal male networks that females cannot break into
- 3) concerns about the political nature of the job
- 4) isolation of women at the administrative level
- 5) salary differentials being inadequate
- 6) night work and long hours
- 7) stamina required to do the job
- 8) seen as "not yet ready"
- 9) personal doubts about their own abilities

10) additional responsibilities that accompany the role

Another obstacle that can keep women out of the school office is androcentrism. Androcentrism is defined as “the practice of viewing the world and shaping reality from a male perspective...It is the elevation of the masculine to the level of the universal and the ideal, and the honouring of men and the male principle above women and the female” (Slauenwhite & Skok, 1991, p. 18). This perception creates a belief in male superiority and in a masculine value system in which female values, experiences, and behaviour are viewed as inferior. Androcentrism encourages and allows inequality among men and women (Barker, 1996). Androcentric attitudes and view points, then, have also inhibited the upward mobility of women into administration, thereby keeping the glass ceiling very much a reality.

Psychological barriers also cause some women to stay away from administration. Even though a female may be just as qualified as a male, she may not apply because of a negative self perception, a lack of confidence in her qualifications and experience or a low expectation of success (Mahoney, 1993). If she *does* apply and is unsuccessful, she may become very discouraged and so may her female counterparts. “When competent, qualified women compete unsuccessfully for administrative jobs, it discourages other women from venturing in the same direction” (Carroll, 2001, p. 9). It is interesting to note that unsuccessful male applicants tend to try even harder at the next opportunity, whereas women tend to shrug their shoulders and sometimes never reapply (Carroll, 2001). When fewer



women apply, it can be said that the low numbers “prove” that women do not want to be administrators (Kennington Edson, 1988).

Jill Wyatt (1990) believes that fear and cynicism are also contributing factors to the low numbers of female administrators. Women fear that speaking out about the inequality they face will only serve to endanger future women’s chances of advancement; they fear that their successes and failures as women will be generalised to other women and will inhibit future possibilities for them (Wyatt, 1990). Men fear that improving the representation of women in senior administrative positions will weaken their position and chances for advancement in the profession (Wyatt, 1990). Kimmel (2000) seems to agree with this concept as he claims that it is not the *presence* of women in the work place that is worrying men, but rather the presence of women *as equals*. Some men also feel intimidated by successful women and have no desire to make a mistake when their “boss” is a female (Hicks, 1996).

For some time now, teaching has been thought of as “women’s work,” but this is not the case with school administration, which has continued to be dominated by males (Kimmel, 2000). Even within the sole career of teaching (excluding administration), there is a gender-defined line that few women seem to cross. “At the start of the twenty-first century, women still hold most of the primary educational positions, and virtually all positions in pre-kindergarten and special education” (Kimmel, 2000, p. 163). The number of women teachers decrease as the grade level rises. Most male teachers end up in secondary and post-secondary teaching positions while most females teach only in the elementary grades (Kimmel, 2000). In Canada, 44% of high school teachers are women and 75% of elementary teachers are women

(Theoret, 2000). The generalisation from these statistics is also true in the district in Southern Alberta examined later in this paper in the area of administration with the lower number of females in secondary positions.

When women do obtain administrative positions, they are most often principals of small elementary schools (Mahoney, 1993). Tallerico (2000) found that superintendents tend to get hired from a pool of senior high principals, even though no research says that senior high principals make better superintendents than elementary principals. This traditional practice is a disadvantage to women since the percentage of male high school principals is much higher than that of women.

It appears that the men in our society know how to apply the concept of “cultural capital” in the area of administration. Cultural capital refers to the understanding of the culture in such a way that one can use it for one’s own advantage. Men can, and do, comprehend the way women are viewed in society (whether they share that view or not) and are able to use their connections, networking, and sex for their benefits in acquiring an administrative position. Women, on the other hand, also understand how society views them but have little or no advantage in using that fact to their benefit. In fact, it is often said that women encounter a glass ceiling in the area of administration and cannot seem to break through it.

#### Differences Between Male and Female Administrators

Women have specific reasons why they desire to go into administration. One of the main reasons women aspire to be administrators is their belief that they can do

something positive for children (Gupton, 1996; Kennington-Edson, 1988). In fact, some studies show that women aim for principalships rather than central office positions so that they can stay close to children (Kennington-Edson, 1996). Other reasons that women desire administrative positions, as stated by Kennington-Edson (1988), include desiring professional growth and challenges that exist in administrative positions, wanting a change in their career, and realising that their qualities and abilities *should* qualify them for a position in administration.

Once in an administrative position, many women still cannot escape guilt. Only now, the guilt stems from not being able to be everything to everyone (Hicks, 1996). Hicks (1996) also notes that public perception does not look at female administrators as favourably as male administrators, causing more challenges for women in administrative positions.

Regan (1995) states that gender is a category of experience and, therefore, women and men may experience and interpret the role of school leadership differently. But she also makes the point that learning from the experiences of the other gender is certainly not impossible, if both genders are willing to try. Gupton (1996) and Kennington-Edson (1988) have also noted other challenges that female administrators face that their male counterparts do not. Females are given less respect, are left out of dominant male networks, experience more reluctance from female staff members, lack professional female networks and still feel that they have to work harder than male administrators to prove their worth. Women are also sometimes accused of “sleeping with the boss” in order to gain their administrative positions (Kennington Edson, 1988).

It is interesting to note that men and women are judged differently for a similar behaviour. Men are “good with details”, but women are “petty” or “picky” (Marshall, 1985). To be considered “heroic”, men must take action while women must endure and sacrifice (Bascia & Young, 2001). Men are viewed as being “assertive”; women are seen to be “pushy” or “aggressive” (Gupton, 1996).

Males and females can sometimes view the same object or activity differently, as well. For instance, females see the daily mail as a way to enhance communication, whereas males see it as an interference (Gupton, 1996). Most men view risk as potential for success but women tend to see it as potential for failure (Albino in Smith & Hale, 2002).

#### Women’s Strengths as Administrators

A variety of researchers have completed studies on the attributes that females bring to the area of administration. Their findings confirm that women can be, and are, just as capable as men as administrators of schools. Morison and Zeimba (1997) state that women are “more inclusive, more consensual, more empathetic, [and] more concerned with process than men” (2). Women tend to be direct, practical, able to deal with detail, sensitive to personality clashes, intuitive about possible problems, and work hard at maintaining relationships within the school (Porat in Shantz, 1993). Women exert their leadership by interacting with members who are primarily responsible for the conduct of the school and proving their genuine concern and their skills to these members (Ortiz and Marshall in Shantz, 1993; Owen in Dorn,

O'Rourke & Papalewis, 2002). Women are also more progressive on issues involving women, children, and family than men (Morison & Ziemba, 1997, p. 2).

Female administrators have a greater preference for activities related to instructional leadership and communication, give recognition to the context of a situation while avoiding authoritarian solutions, and use a problem solving approach that incorporates flexibility and creativity (Marshall & Mitchel in Shantz, 1993; Rosener in Dorn, O'Rourke & Papalewis, 2002). Women in administration tend to empower teachers, consider teachers' feelings, and involve teachers in making decisions (Shakeshaft, Nowell & Perry in Shantz, 1993). Gips (in Shantz, 1993) and Ludwig (in Smith and Hale, 2002) confirm these findings by stating that women emphasise human relationships, care for individuals, are concerned with responsibility, equity, fairness, inclusion, interdependence, and cooperation.

The male communication and leadership styles are the ones that are highly valued in many organisations, according to research completed by Haslett, Geis & Carter (in Dorn, O'Rourke & Papalewis, 2002). But, "school environments led by females tend to have a teaching and learning focus, are less concerned with standardised achievement and tend to be close-knit communities where individuals feel valued and cared for" (Shakeshaft in Shantz, 1993, p. 12). Staffs who have a female administrator have higher job satisfaction and are more engaged in their work than those of a male administrator (Shakeshaft in Dorn, O'Rourke & Papalewis, 2002).

### Increasing the Number of Female Administrators

Many authors have some suggestions on how the numbers of females in school administrative positions can be increased. Mahoney (1993) and Dotzler (1996) suggest that aspiring women need to be mentored by women currently acting as administrators. "Female educators lack same sex representatives upon which to pattern their career aspirations and goals" (Kennington-Edson, 1988, p. 61). But many female aspirants report reluctance to approach potential administrative mentors in fear of jeopardising their rapport with other teachers (Kennington-Edson, 1988). Women are encouraged to begin networking with one another, just as men do, by becoming involved in situations where good contacts can be established. In her study of female administrators, Pearman (1999) found that networks "provide a widening circle of personal and professional references who can assist in the promotion of women as candidates for positions (31). Talerico (2000) recommends that current administrators act as mentors and teachers to women who are interested in administration by giving them additional responsibilities so they can see how it feels to be a leader.

Gupton (1996) suggests that a female aspiring to be an administrator puts in extra time early in her career to gain many experiences that will help her to not only attain an administrative position, but to be more successful in it, as well. Believing in herself, committing herself to becoming an administrator, creating a career plan, letting others know that she has expectations of career advancement, and honing in on her communication skills are strategies that Parat suggests (in Mahoney, 1993).

Another suggestion to help women slip through the “sunroof”, is to have a balanced hiring committee. The committee that is involved in hiring future administrators should be balanced by gender, race, and ethnicity because of the “similar attraction” factor: the human tendency to prefer people who are most like ourselves (Tallerico, 2000). A balanced hiring committee helps to ensure that one gender is not preferred over the next (Riehl & Byrd, 1997).

The use of “affirmative action” to increase the number of female administrators is an idea that is suggested by Riehl & Byrd (1987) and Theoret (2000). “Affirmative action may be perceived as a dated concept...But by dismissing affirmative action we create the perception that the issue of gender discrimination in the teaching profession has been tackled and that we have arrived at some level of “equity”. This is a “myth” (Theoret, 10).

Wesson (in Pearman, 1999) makes these suggestions to women aspiring to leadership positions in schools:

1. Know yourself. Be honest and objectively evaluate your strengths, abilities and aspirations.
2. Be prepared. Credentials and work experience are important.
3. Analyze your career situations and strategize your career moves so that each move will maximise the potential for achieving your goals.
4. Work at turning negative experiences into positive factors to be utilised in reaching your goals.

5. Be aware of three critical factors that affect advancement:  
structural barriers, role compatibility, and organisational fit.
6. Affiliate with other races, genders, and professional groups.
7. Share your goals with others.
8. Find a mentor and be a mentor.
9. Network with others for information, advice, and support.

An understanding of the barriers, and the methods of possibly overcoming them, is crucial in addressing the imbalance of women in administration. The focus of this document will now shift to look at one specific public school district and the female administrators within it.



## Chapter Three

### A Closer Look at One District

The information presented in earlier chapters focussed on the national or international picture of women in educational administration. This chapter looks specifically at the context in which my study took place.

In 1999, the Alberta Teachers' Association Magazine printed an article by Young and Ansara that outlined the province's statistics for women in educational administration in the public districts. The authors compared the statistics in 1988-89 to the ones in 1996-97.

The percentage of female principals in Alberta rose from 17% in 1988 to 32% in 1996. Of that 32%, 44% of those women were elementary principals, 18% were junior high principals, another 18% were senior high principals, and 24% were principals of multi-level schools.

The percentage of assistant or vice principals also rose from 1988 to 1996. Forty-four percent of the assistant principalships belonged to women in 1996, compared to 24% in 1988. Of the 44%, 61% of the women held assistant principalships at the elementary level, 39% at the junior high level, 30% at the senior high level, and 34% were assistant principals at multi-level schools.

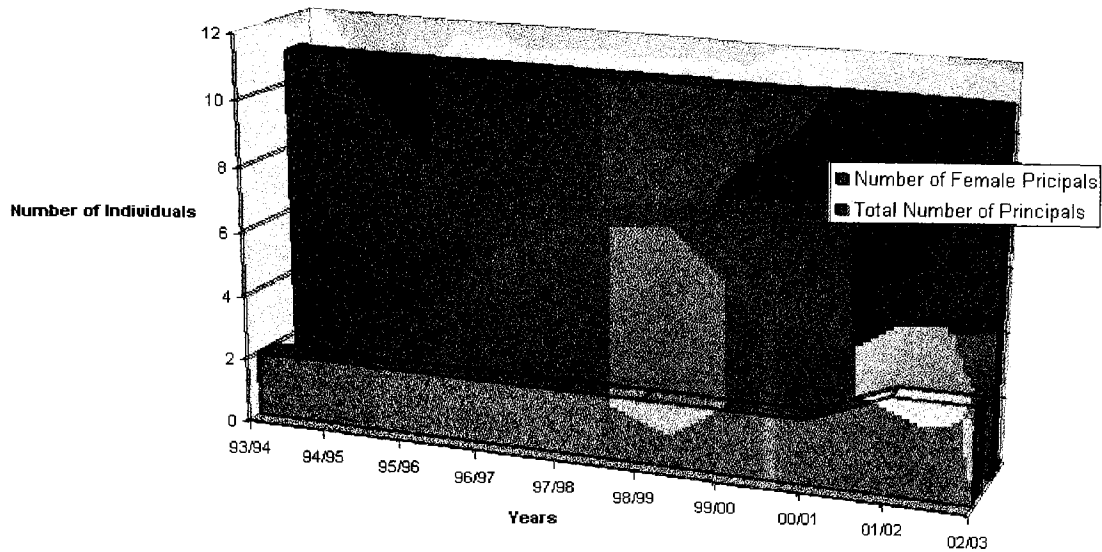
The percentage of women in central office staff positions provincially, however, declined slightly. In 1988, 62% of central office staff were women. In 1996, that figure dropped three percent to 59%.

These statistics are aligned with what the research says in terms of the

number of female administrators starting to increase. The numbers also confirm that women are hired more for elementary administrative positions than secondary ones.

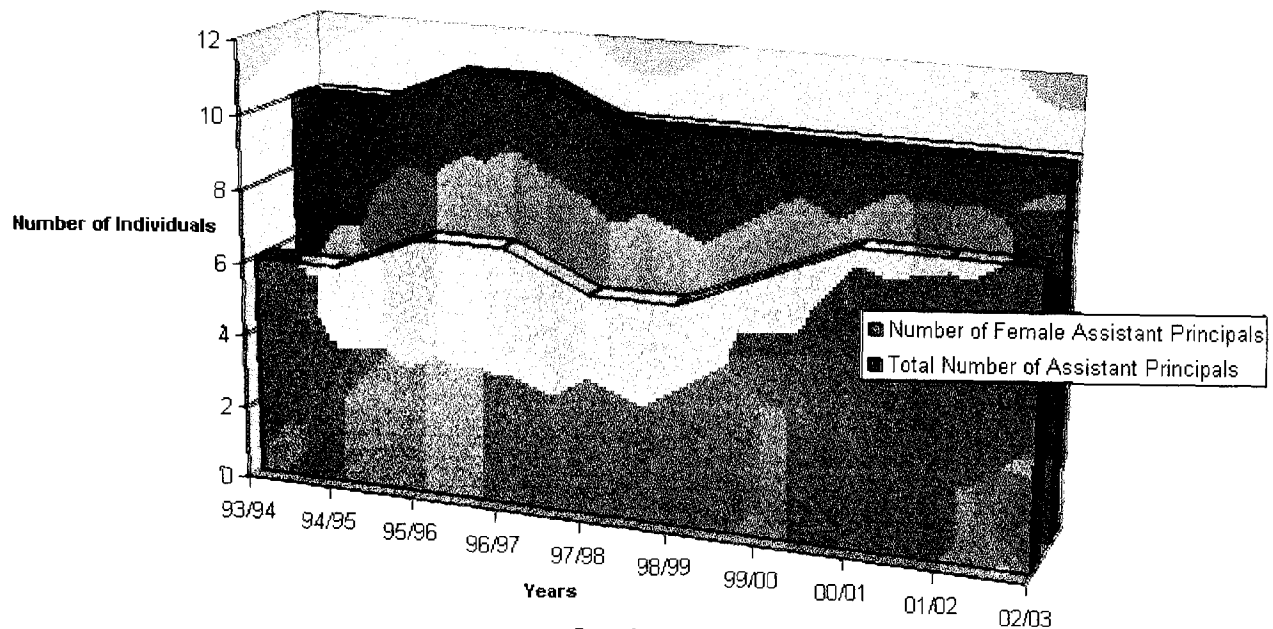
What follows is a detailed look at the number of female administrators in a public school district in Southern Alberta. The information was gathered through the local Alberta Teachers' Association rosters for a period of ten years from 1993 to 2002.

As Graph 1 depicts, only two or three females have occupied a principalship at the elementary level out of a possible eleven positions over the last ten years. This statistic does not match what the research says about women in administrative positions. Most elementary principals are women, according to the literature. It is also interesting to note that over the last ten years that statistic has remained fairly constant with two or three women serving as an elementary principal each year. Some of these women have retired or resigned and have been replaced with other women, leaving the overall number of women in these positions the same.



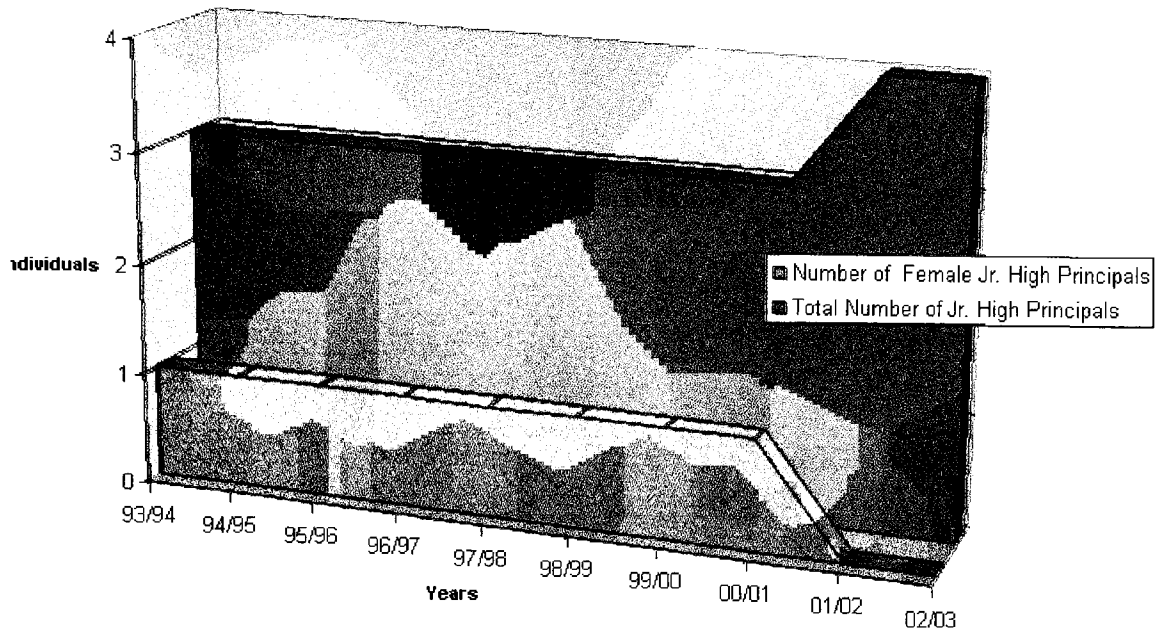
**Graph 1**  
**Women in Elementary Administrative**  
**Principalships**

Graph 2 shows that women have occupied the majority of elementary assistant principals in this district over the last decade, fluctuating between sixty and eighty percent. This high percentage at the assistant principal level, however, has not managed to transfer up into the position of principal at the elementary level. One could argue that just as the elementary principals are imbalanced in terms of gender in favor of the males, so the assistant principals are imbalanced in favor of the females.



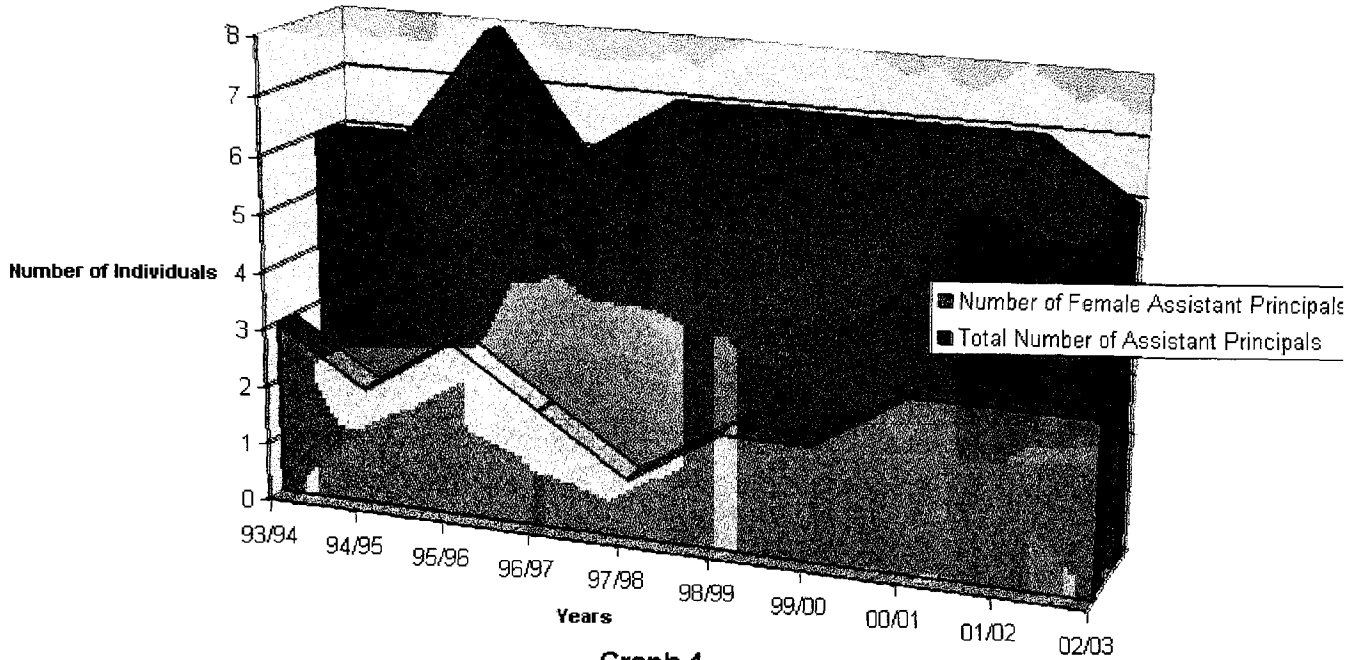
**Graph 2**  
**Women in Elementary Administrative**  
**Assistant Principalships**

The next graph, graph 3, also depicts a fairly constant trend with one third of the junior high (now called “middle schools” in this district) principals being female. This statistic dropped, however, when the one female principal retired in June of 2001 and was replaced by a male. A fourth school was integrated into this district in the fall of 2001, thus adding another principal position at the junior high level from that year on. There is only one administrative position at that “new” school.



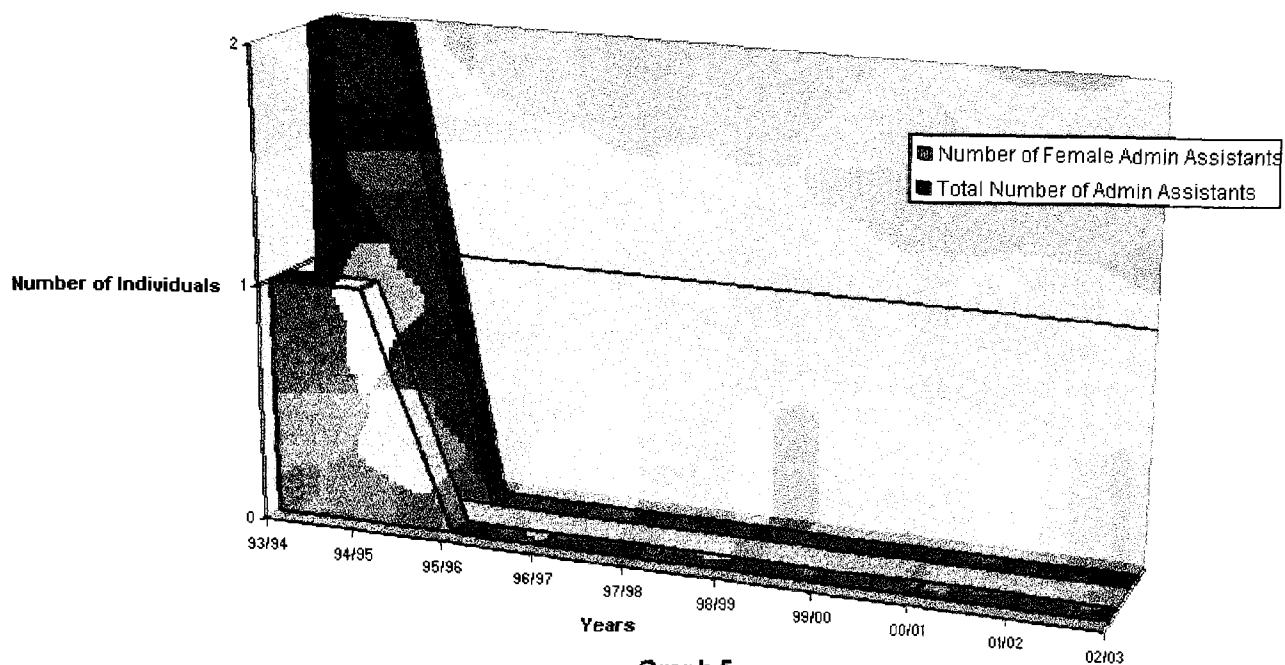
**Graph 3**  
**Women in Jr. High Administrative**  
**Principalships**

The percentage of women serving as assistant principals at the junior high level in this district has vacillated between 14% and 50% throughout the last decade. The consistency was established in this statistic from 1998 on, as is evident in Graph 4.



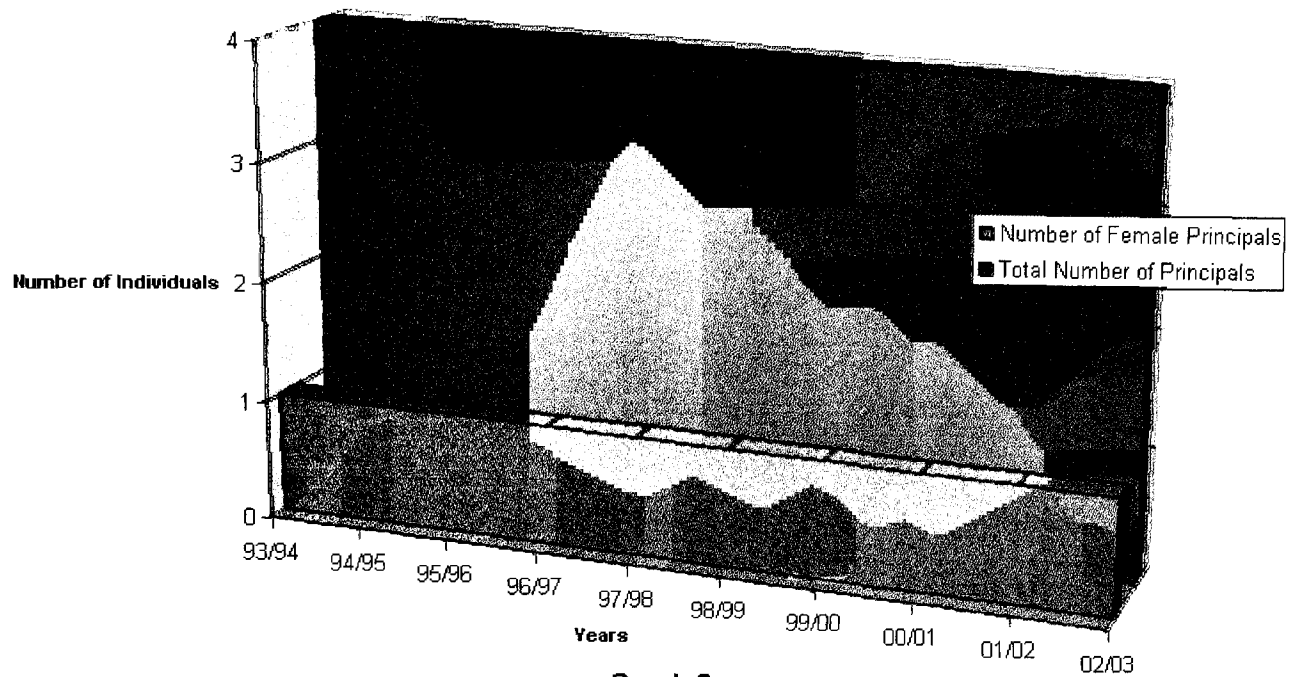
**Graph 4**  
**Women in Jr. High Administrative**  
**Assistant Principalships**

Graph 5 depicts an administrative assistant statistic that became non-existent in this district after 1995. It is of interest to note, however, that one of these administrative assistants was a male and the other was a female. The male went on to a career in administration while the female went back to the classroom when their administrative assistant terms were up. Both have remained in this district.



**Graph 5**  
**Women in Jr. High**  
**Administrative Assistants**

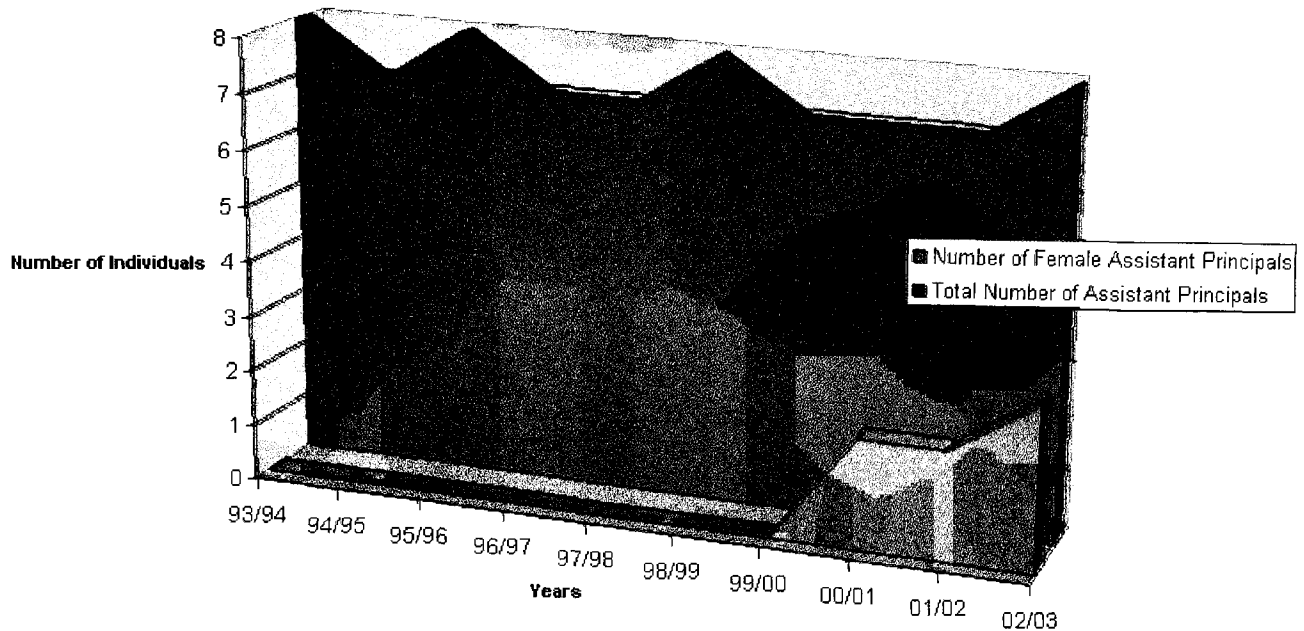
The same woman is represented every year in Graph 6. She was the principal at one high school in 1993 and moved to be the principal of another high school in 2000, allowing the percentage to remain constant at 25% for the decade examined. This data is consistent with the literature as very few women are found to be principals of high schools.



**Graph 6**  
**Women in Sr. High Administrative**  
**Principalships**

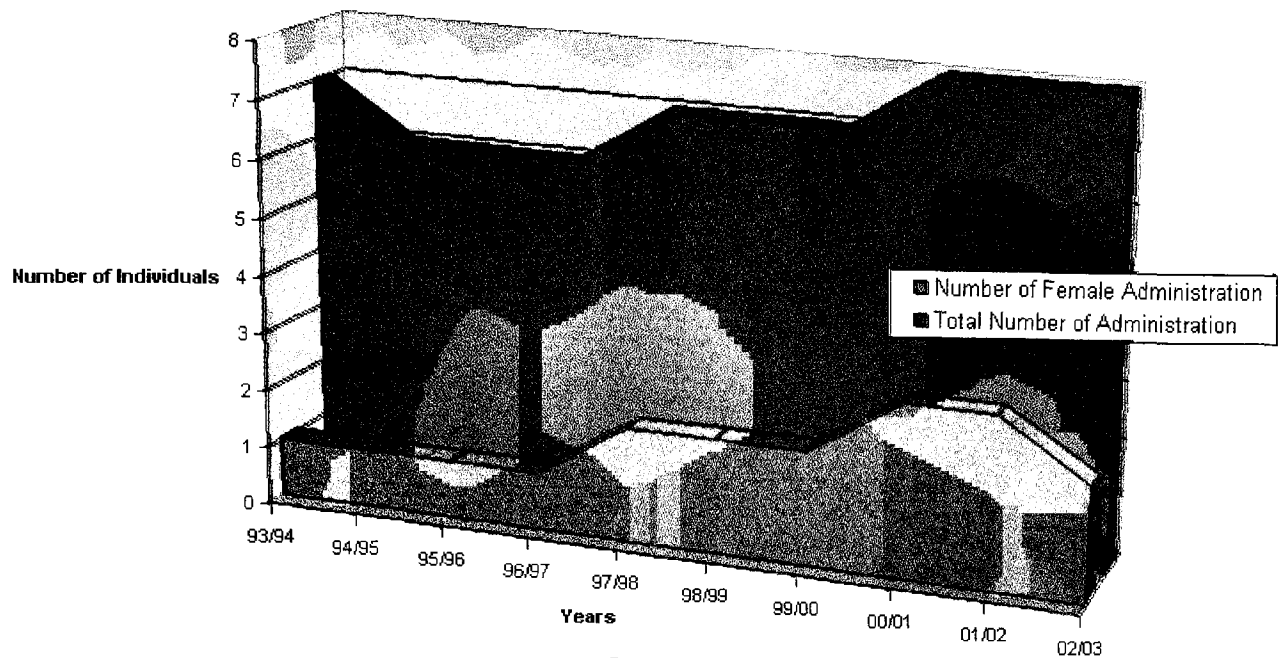
There were no females in high school assistant principal positions in this district until the year 2000, as is shown in Graph 7. This, too, is consistent with the documented low numbers of women in high school administration in the literature.





**Graph 7**  
**Women in Sr. High Administrative**  
**Assistant Principals**

The number of women serving at central office as associate superintendents, coordinators and directors is shown in Graph 8. The first female director was in charge of special education for the district. This position continues to be occupied by a woman in this district. The second female director's job was to oversee the area of curriculum. This position also continues to be occupied by a woman. In the year 2000, another female joined the central office staff and she coordinated the Alberta Initiatives for School Improvement (AIS) projects in the district. When she retired, she was replaced by a male. Within the decade studied, no woman served as an associate superintendent, deputy superintendent, or superintendent in this particular district.



**Graph 8**  
**Women in Central Office**  
**Coordinators, Directors, Superintendants**

Overall, this district has increased from 32% of the principal and assistant principal positions being occupied by women in 1993, to 42% in 2002. The years that saw the most growth in the number of female administrators was 2000 and 2001.

This chapter provided an intermediate look from a wider national summary of research to a local context before examining my specific study.

## Chapter Four

### Methodology

“Women need to be able to tell their own stories because their problems and life experiences are different from those of men” (Shakeshaft in Dorn, O’Rourke & Papplewis, 2002).

I wanted to gather other women’s perceptions as they pertain to becoming or being a school administrator. The method I used in my study was a questionnaire.

“If well constructed, a questionnaire permits the collection of reliable and reasonably valid data in a simple, cheap and timely manner” (Anderson, 1998, p. 170).

Gathering questionnaire information is meaningful as it can be easily compared to that of what the majority of research tells us is true. “Questionnaires lend themselves to logical and organized data entry and analysis for both quantitative and qualitative findings” (Anderson, 1998, p. 182).

I chose to use a questionnaire because I needed to use a tool that would allow me to collect data from a fairly large number of respondents who were working in fifteen different locations within one school district (Anderson, 1998). Administering a questionnaire was more efficient than meeting with each of the female administrators individually to ask them my questions. Also, the questionnaire format allowed each of the subjects anonymity, creating a setting in which their responses had the potential to be more detailed and open.

The open-ended format of the items on the questionnaire allowed the

subjects to provide in-depth answers to the questions. The information gathered from questionnaires provided a continued understanding of the impressions of being a female educational administrator in Southern Alberta.

As a first step, I met with the district's Superintendent of Schools to discuss my study and to show him the questionnaire. After receiving his support, I followed the guidelines and protocols of the Human Subject Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge. My application to complete the study was approved after making some revisions to my procedures. I then administered a questionnaire in January, 2004 in a "comment on" format with fifteen open-ended questions to twenty-six current female administrators in one public school district in southern Alberta.

In conjunction with other research, I chose to focus my questions around similar themes in the current literature. In the first question, I asked how long the subjects had been administrators as I was interested in the demographics of the women. The second and third questions centered around the women's career goals. The fourth question asked about any barriers or obstacles they may have encountered on the road to becoming female administrators. The women's strongest personal attributes as administrators were themes in the fifth and sixth questions. Question numbers seven and ten asked about their perceptions of the attributes that female administrators need and the benefits women bring as leaders of schools. The eighth and eleventh questions focussed on the perceived differences between male and female authority. The ways women work as school leaders and their reasons for choosing a career in administration were the themes in questions twelve and thirteen.

The last two questions looked at the factors that may need to change in order for more women to move into school administrative positions.

Some of the questions were adapted from a case study done by Dorr, O'Rourke & Paplewis in 2002. The questions I asked were:

1. How long have you been an educational administrator?
2. How long had you wanted to be an educational administrator before you were successful in attaining such a position?
3. Why did you want to become an educational administrator?
4. What obstacles, if any, did you encounter in your quest to become an educational administrator?
5. What do you feel are some of your strongest professional qualities as an educational administrator?
6. What do you feel is your one strong personal quality that has helped you in your role as an educational administrator?
7. What do you think are some important qualities female leaders in education need?
8. Please describe some of the difficulties you have had as an administrator that you attribute to being female.
9. What support systems, if any, have been in place for you as a female educational administrator?
10. Please describe the benefits of having women in school administration.
11. Do you feel the issues surrounding authority are the same for a male educational administrator and a female educational administrator?

12. Please describe some of the approaches you use in decision making and problem solving.
13. What are some of the important life experiences you have had that facilitated your choice to become an administrator?
14. What factors do you feel need to change in order to help more qualified women to become educational administrators?
15. Do you perceive there to be a need for an increase in the number of female administrators in schools? If so, what can school districts and school leaders do to contribute to the increase in the number of women in leadership and what can they do to increase success for female administrators?

The twenty-one female subjects who responded are all currently serving as principals, assistant principals, associate superintendent(s), directors, and coordinators of elementary, middle, and senior high schools in the same school district.

Out of twenty-six questionnaires, twenty-one responded, creating an 81% return rate. Often, the predicted rate of return is 33%. Therefore, the 81% return rate in my study is *very* positive. One of the subjects sent her questionnaire in too late for me to include in the results, so there are twenty subject's responses to all fifteen of the items. Subjects were encouraged to mail their responses to me, but I also volunteered to pick them up from them if that was more convenient.

Three of the participants are principals, twelve are assistant principals, and five are directors, coordinators, or associate superintendents. All of these administrators are at various stages in their careers. Because I am also a female

administrator in this particular district, I completed a questionnaire and included the information in the responses.

After the collection process was complete, I analyzed the responses to each question in search of common themes. I then analyzed the information thematically, and compared it with the descriptions found to be typical of female administrators in the research literature.

Because I work in the district in which this study was done, there is less freedom in reporting the responses I received from my subjects. An ethical mindset was required throughout the entire study. Some information was difficult to report in the results of the study because of the possible ramifications to the participants or myself. What can be said is almost always problematic in these issues. It was still important to me to explore this topic so that we can work more generatively to include more women in the future of educational administration.

## Chapter Five

### Results, Analysis, and Discussion

The results from the twenty questionnaires are presented in this chapter under question headings. The responses are documented according to themes or key issues from information given by the participants. In the interests of anonymity of the participants and because of the nature of their roles, the responses are grouped according to women in the same position within the district, such as principals, assistant principals, and central office staff.

#### **Question 1: How long have you been an educational administrator?**

The range of responses to this question was one year to seventeen years. Sixteen of these women have been an administrator for less than ten years. The mean of the length of time this group has served as an administrator is 6.5 years. The median of this numerical data is 5.5 years and the mode is 8 years.

The female principals have been in administration for an average of 11 years. The female assistant principals have been administrators for an average of 3.9 years. Central office staff have been serving in administrative positions for an average of 7.8 years. These averages make sense in that principals and central office positions are usually occupied by more “experienced” administrators. The average years of service for female assistant principals is quite low, leading to a conclusion that hiring women into these positions is a newer practice in this particular district.



Here is a listing of the participants' responses:

Subject Identification	Subject Response
101	midway through 8 <sup>th</sup> year
102	4 years
103	3 ½ years
104	I am in my 8 <sup>th</sup> year.
106	2 years this year
107	13 years
109	2 years
110	Since 1987 – this is my 17 <sup>th</sup>
111	5 ½ years
112	3 years
113	2 years
114	Eight years
115	This is my first year.
117	2.5 years
118	4 years
119	8 years
122	11 years
123	9 years
124	5 years
126	12 years in total

The average of the length of time for women serving as administrators is quite low in this district, when compared to the research. This low average can present a challenge in terms of historical and contextual knowledge and the absence of enough mentors who are experienced women in educational administration.

**Question 2: How long had you wanted to be an educational administrator before you were successful in attaining such a position?**

The answers to this question varied a great deal not only in number but in how the idea of becoming an administrator was introduced to them. Fifteen of the subjects were able to give a definite amount of time that they waited to become an administrator. The amounts of time the women waited were between 3 weeks and 15 years with the average amount of waiting time being 3.4 years. The median of this numerical data is 2 years and the mode is also 2 years.

Here is a listing of the participants' responses:

Subject Identification	Subject Response
101	2-3 years
102	two years previous to my first application
103	6 years
104	I applied for 2 years.
106	I had always thought about but decided to pursue it more actively 2 years before I got a position.
107	I had not really anticipated being an

	<p>administrator. When I was approached to take a position I thought about it quite some time before accepting.</p>
109	1 year
110	only about a year or two
111	6 months
112	<p>It had been a long-term goal for 1-2 years prior. Circumstances (sudden admin[istrative] illness and subsequent retirement) shortened my timelines considerably.</p>
113	<p>While I had considered serving the district in this capacity in the past, I chose another route. I was successful in my second application when I decided to pursue admin[istration].</p>
114	<p>It was never a real goal. My career interests led me into the leadership area specifically literacy, portfolio development and work on committees beyond the school.</p>
115	<p>I've thought about it since I completed my Master's 5 years ago but felt I needed experience with Special Ed[ucation] first.</p>

117	Seriously – 3 weeks. Flirting with the idea throughout Master’s program (6 years). Still wonder if this is what I want to do.
118	2 years
119	Actually, administration came to me. I had not thought about it prior to it happening.
122	I was not wanting to be an administrator at all. I was actively pursuing a Master’s degree in Counseling but had the opportunity to “act” as an administrator. I was successful in obtaining a position immediately.
123	Since my first year as a teacher (1980).
124	I thought that a career in the education area would be interesting for two to three years prior.
126	5 years (about)

Three women said that they just “came into” the role without their goal being an administrative position. The other two women said that they were approached and asked to serve as an administrator and had to think about whether they would be willing to actually be an administrator or not before responding. I calculated subject

123's years of waiting to be fifteen years using her answer question number one and the information she provided to question number two.

The principals' average amount of waiting time is the least of the three groups at 1.3 years. The assistant principals' average number of years they waited for an administrative position is 1.8 years. Central office staff waited the longest for their positions at an average of 5 years.

One woman said that even though she "flirted with the idea" of becoming an administrator for six years and has served in that role for some time, she still wonders if that position is where she wants to be.

**Question 3: Why did you want to become an educational administrator?**

Most women provided more than one response to this question. The following responses were given by more than one woman as a reason why she went into administration. The brackets behind the responses denote the number of women out of twenty who replied with that particular response:

- To make a difference in schools (7)
- To experience a challenge or change in their career (5)
- To use their skills (5)
- To work in the context of the "big picture" of a school and/or district (4)
- To support teachers or make teachers' lives easier (3)
- To impact decisions made at a higher level (2)
- To assist in implementing curriculum (2)
- Confidence in self (2)

Other responses that were given in answer to this question that only appeared once center around a couple of different themes, one being internal factors. One of these women felt that she could do a better job than other administrators, and wanted to do just that. Another two women wanted to “be of service” to their community, or to spend more time with adults. Other responses that could be classified as internal factors are the enjoyment of leadership, the desire to support students’ learning, and an interest in the area of administration. One woman summarized her reasons for wanting to become an administrator in these words: “I have a focus on the ‘big picture’ and felt that I could play a role in supporting student learning and students’ experiences in schools. I love the relationships it allows me with students, staff, and partners.” Another woman said this: “I believed I had the skills, experience, and education and wanted the challenge.”

More singular responses center around a theme of external factors. One said that the reason she went into administration was because a family member had been an administrator. Her response to this question was, “My mother had been an administrator and that path seemed interesting.” Other responses of an external nature were an invitation to apply, mentors influencing and/or encouraging a career in administration, “life circumstances”, possessing the necessary education, building relationships with students and staff, and having the status that comes from a job as an administrator. One woman said: “I was asked to apply for an administrative assistant position within the school I was teaching at.” Another subject put her “invitation” into administration this way: “I had no desire to go into administration

but was asked to consider a temporary positions. After that, it was the challenge, change, and opportunities that interested me.”

In comparison to the research, the reasons these women gave in this study for going into administration match. “Making a difference” in schools, is reported as being one of the most common reasons why women desire these positions of leadership. The desire for challenge and professional growth, as listed in the second and third largest responses in this study, are also very common reasons why women become administrators.

**Question 4: What obstacles, if any, did you encounter in your quest to become an educational administrator?**

Many women gave more than one response to this question. The following responses were given by more than one woman about the obstacles she faced in her quest to become an administrator. The brackets behind the response denotes the number of women who replied with that particular response:

- No obstacles (7)
- Age (4)
- No response given (4)
- Gender (2)
- People did not know me (2)
- Time to prove to others that I was qualified (2)

Some other responses that women identified (but only once) as barriers were internal ones. These included a need for developing personal confidence,

recognizing own strengths, indecision about whether to apply or not and waiting to apply for the “right” position.

Other singular responses expressed external barriers such as people not taking her seriously, a lack of opportunities in the district, came into the profession late, and waiting for children to grow up. One woman said, “I only had one [obstacle]. I wanted to wait until my two children were old enough that it did not impact the quality of their lives with my long hours.” Another woman responded to this question with this: “Time – as I have come to this professional experience later than some of my colleagues I feel pressured by time and believe that my age may be considered a barrier by some.” Time was also a theme in another response, specifically for a different reason: “It took time to prove to those in leadership that I had the potential to be a school leader.”

It was encouraging to discover that 7 women (35% of the participants), felt that they had encountered no obstacles at all in this district as they sought administrative positions. One of those women had this to say about the obstacles (or lack thereof) she faced: “None – my all-male school administrators and senior district administration encouraged and supported me from the beginning. Interesting, though, that two of the men who also applied for my job told my closest colleagues that I wouldn’t get the job because of my age/gender.” Another woman, though, responded with this statement: “There are none that I want to write about.” This last statement says that there have been obstacles that she has encountered but has no interest, or trust, in identifying them in any way.



Only two participants listed “gender” as an obstacle to administration, but others mentioned raising children which can obviously be considered a gender barrier.

The barriers that these women identified are also found in the research. At the same time, the research lists many more that are completely absent in this study (e.g., lack of female role models, hierarchical structure), causing this researcher to believe that significant progress has been made in this district.

**Question 5: What do you feel are some of your strongest professional qualities as an educational administrator?**

Even though only one response was requested for this question, many women reported *multiple* strengths as administrators. The following responses were given numerous times by women. The digit(s) in brackets denote the number of women that reported that particular strength:

- Care about relationships with people (12)
- Visioning skills (6)
- Communication skills (5)
- Organization skills (5)
- Flexibility (5)
- Collaborate and work as a team with others (4)
- Leadership skills (4)
- Life – long learner (3)
- Experience (3)

- Integrity (3)
- Work ethic (3)
- Belief in Professional development (2)
- Commitment (2)
- Honesty (2)
- Supportive of staff (2)

Other responses provided by the subjects that were only mentioned once as professional strengths include: strong teaching background, strong values, ability to follow through with decisions and actions, planning, being task-oriented, belief that a difference can be made, resiliency, interest in staying current in educational trends, belief in children's learning, education, sense of humor, determination, courage, empathy, personality, availability, ability to motivate and encourage others, confidence, and the ability to provide a different perspective on educational issues.

One woman responded with this answer: "My ability to deal with people is strong – I am a life-long learner and an instructional leader. I believe firmly in professional development and keep my staff involved in that aspect."

The responses from the females in this study correlate strongly with what the research says women bring to administrative positions. The emphasis on relationships with people in the school is one of the qualities that most women find to be a critical and natural part of their administrative jobs.

It would be interesting in a future study or in existing studies to compare these responses with male administrators responses to this kind of question.

**Question 6: What do you feel is your one strong personal quality that has helped you in your role as an educational administrator?**

In answering this question, some women responded with more than one of their personal strengths that have helped them in their role as administrators. The following is a listing of the responses that were given by more than one woman. The bracket denotes the number of women that provided that particular response to question six:

- Caring about and having relationships with people (7)
- Communication skills (4)
- Visioning skills (2)

There were many more singular responses than there were common ones for this question. The singular responses include: mediation skills, supportive of teachers, work ethic, multi-tasking, flexibility, empathy, sense of humor, commitment, perceptiveness, attention to detail, approachability, positive, passionate, willingness to learn, public speaking skills, and problem solving skills. Most of these responses are components of the relational aspect of leadership. One female administrator put her one strongest personal quality this way: "Caring for people around me: staff, students, parents. Knowing that I care has resulted in much support for my decisions as most people trust my motives for making them."

The research says much of the same about women's strongest personal qualities. Women are known for their caring and relational attributes and women in school leadership positions monopolize on those attributes to create a caring and

nurturing environment for their students and staff. Women's "people skills" help to make them very successful administrators.

**Question 7: What do you think are some important qualities female leaders in education need?**

The responses to this question were as unique as the subjects themselves. As with other items on this questionnaire, many women responded by identifying more than one important quality for successful female leaders. Some, however, made a point that there should be no distinction between female leaders and their male counterparts; a good leadership quality is a good leadership quality, regardless of the gender it happens to belong to. It is interesting to note, however, that most of the women that made this comment still went on to list qualities that they felt were important in leadership.

Here are the common responses from the female administrators for question seven. The number in brackets denotes the number of women that listed that quality in their response:

- Confidence (6)
- Visioning skills (6)
- Should be no distinction between male and female leadership qualities (6)
- Communication skills (4)
- Determination (4)
- Collaborate and work as a team with others (3)
- Courage (3)

- Empathy (3)
- Sense of humor (2)
- Thick skin (2)
- Assertive (2)
- Decisiveness (2)
- Staying informed (2)
- Tenacity (2)

Many other qualities were listed by the women as being important for female leaders to possess. These include: seeing the needs of the students, intelligence, emotional stability, the ability to *not* dwell on being a female, a strong support system, security, knowledge, able to comfortably associate with both males and females, research skills, accounting skills, time management, ability to be “a male”, objectivity, work ethic, interpersonal skills, compassion, task focussed, initiative, energy, positive attitude, delegation skills, honesty, conflict resolution skills, professionalism, ability to accept help, willingness to learn, and the ability to change. One of the subjects defined assertiveness as “the need to be heard and valued in a group of men.”

Most of the qualities that the women identified in responding to this question can be learned. For instance, time management, accounting, research, delegation, initiative, work ethic, conflict resolution, collaboration, and interpersonal skills can all be acquired or strengthened through experience and/or formal training. The other skills the women identified as important are more intrinsically based, but can still be cultured if the leader desires them to be.

Much of what the women responded to in this question is a match to the research. Successful female administrators are confident, able to create and communicate their vision to the staff, and work well with others. But the viewpoint that there should be no distinction between male and female leaders' important qualities is not readily found in the literature. Most of the research on this topic segregates the women's qualities from the men's and lists them as being separate and unique. Here, again, it would be interesting to compare male administrators' responses to females' with this kind of question.

**Question 8: Please describe some of the difficulties you have had as an administrator that you attribute to being female.**

There were only two responses to this question that were duplicated by the women. Two women responded with the word, "none", while another two women chose not to respond to this particular question at all. It is human nature to protect one's self and not to share such details. It is also to be expected that if there were areas of personal difficulty that the participant's would not discuss them, but these situations are alluded to in such responses. Most of the women that did respond, listed more than one difficulty that they attributed to being female.

One of the themes in the responses to difficulties as administrators that the subjects attributed to being female centered around males, either as students or as colleagues. Here is a listing of those responses:

- Being physically assaulted by a man who disagreed with her
- Possessing the only female voice in a group of administrators

- Hearing and dealing with male colleagues' inappropriate comments
- Male students' and parents' view of female authority being different from that of male authority
- Male students respond better to men
- Finding ways of connecting with male colleagues
- Male chauvinism
- Being heard and listened to in male-dominated meetings
- Being left out of "lunches with the boys"
- Verifying that she did not have to become or take on a male persona

Some of the comments the women made in response to this question are very specifically about the difficulties they have had with men. "When some male administrators first meet me, they tend to throw inappropriate comments my way. This makes me uncomfortable and I do not always have the confidence to express my point of view. It is usually after working with me that they realise I have valued input." Another women said this: "I don't golf. But not everyone does. I don't watch sports, but not everyone does. So I have to make a conscious effort to find ways to connect with males at this level." One woman discussed the fact that she has had some difficulties with male students: "Some male students do not view male/female authority roles to be equal." Another female administrator commented that her male supervisor always wanted her work "double-checked" by a male to ensure its accurateness.

Besides some of these women having difficulties with males, some of them also had difficulties with females. One subject reported that her female colleagues

were jealous when she was hired for the administrative position and they were not. She said, "The first staff I worked with, two other females and one male applied for the job. It was an internal posting. The other women did not take kindly to me being the successful candidate. They made my life *very* difficult."

Other difficulties that the women listed that they attributed to being female were: opposition from staff, expectation to fit into a traditional administrative style, viewed as being young and naive, dealing with physical altercations, the "glass ceiling", being overlooked when opportunities arose, not being taken seriously, and the viewpoint that some colleagues have that women who desire administrative positions are power hungry.

Most of the literature talks about the barriers women encounter before becoming an administrator, suggests ways to rectify the boundaries, and identifies women's strengths as administrators. The difficulties women encounter while serving as administrators that they attribute to their gender is an area of research that I hope will one day be expanded upon.

**Question 9: What support systems, if any, have been in place for you as a female educational administrator?**

Some women administrators shared that they have access to more than one support system. Two women said that they feel very comfortable calling other administrators (of *both* genders) for advice. Only one subject said that she had no support system at all. The following is a listing of the common responses from the



women for this particular question. The numbers in brackets denote the number of women who gave that response:

- Other females serving in similar positions (7)
- Other administrators (7)
- Mentors (no sex specified) (4)
- Central office administrators (3)
- Colleagues (3)
- Female mentors or role models (3)
- Friends (2)

Other support systems that were individual responses from these women were: readings, husband, professional development, male colleagues, the district mentorship program, and seminars.

The research speaks to the importance of having mentors for female administrators. The majority of women in this district have mentors or colleagues that they feel they can turn to to support them. The gender of the supporter does not seem significant to these women, but their presence is obviously very significant. One of the subjects responded with this version of her support system: “Other female administrators. We call it the ‘old girls’ network.”

**Question 10: Please describe the benefits of having women in school administration.**

Most women chose to identify more than one benefit they saw in having women as school administrators. The majority of their responses centered around

“balance.” Two women responded that they felt that there was no particular benefit for having women as administrators over men, as long as all of them were strong leaders. The following is a listing of common responses with the number of women responding with the same benefit being in the number in brackets following the statement:

- Provides balance (with styles, strengths, perceptions, perspectives) (18)
- Provides role models for students (4)
- Nurturing perspective (3)
- Gender balance (2)
- Meets needs of “whole” student (2)

The responses given by one female with regard to the benefits of having women in school administration are as follows: team work, openness to others, willingness to learn, knowing the needs of their school, keeping current, compassion, providing the staff choice to be able to talk with a male or a female, and the different experiences women bring to the position.

Two women were very specific about how they felt with regard to this question: “It isn’t a matter of women – it is a matter of selecting the *best* person for the job – in any profession.” Another said, “I don’t think a woman should be in admin[istration] just because of her gender. The skills and attributes of any administrator must be considered.”

Yet another viewpoint was expressed by a woman who said, “We must have a balance of men and women to ensure that issues are addressed with the greatest range

of perspectives. Women *do* have different experiences and bring a rich dimension of understanding of education to leadership roles.”

The research certainly has components of these women’s views in it. The strengths that women bring to the roles of school leadership have been researched and reported in depth. But the concept of “hiring the best person for the job, regardless of gender” is not readily found in the research on women in school administration. This may be because, as a whole, the number of females as compared to males in administrative jobs is imbalanced. But in this particular district, the women are more concerned with hiring the best person for the job so that women are not viewed as being hired “just because she’s female.” The practice of hiring a woman, just because she is a woman, can diminish the valuable contributions women bring to the role, especially from the point of view of male counterparts who may have competed unsuccessfully for the job.

**Question 11: Do you feel the issues surrounding authority are the same for a male educational administrator and a female educational administrator?**

Five of the women that responded to this question felt that authority for males and females is the same in administration. One subject simply responded that she did not believe that male and female authority is the same. One woman chose not to respond to this question at all.

The common responses are listed below with the number of women responding that way in brackets:

- Females have to prove themselves more than males (4)

- Lack of physical stature a disadvantage for women (3)
- Female has to assert herself more (2)

The other responses by individual women still center around their comparison to male authority: men are more respected, men have more authority, and the perception of authority is seen as being easier if you are male. Another woman shared that she experienced that more women challenged her female administrative authority than males did. She said, “I think it is easier to have a perception of authority if you are male.” One other subject shared that she felt bullied by a male adult when he tried to intimidate her with his male “presence.”

Of male students, one subject said this: “...adolescent males who have been raised with “no respect” for females, create greater challenges to females than to males. Physical presence is usually “bigger” for males.” Of students in general, another participant said: “I believe men are more “respected” or “feared” in our society and by our students than women. Women have to work more on their respect – usually through *relationship* rather than *authority* or *power*.”

Another subject expressed her feelings of male and female authority comparisons this way: “I feel that women often feel they have to exert more pressure or take a more aggressive stance to be seen as authoritative. This approach may often be seen as a woman being ‘bitchy.’”

Male and female authority differences are subjects that have had little literature written on them. But one thing is certain, the interpretation of female authority and the implications of it, are not topics that the women in this district are

in consensus on. Some see that there is no difference, while others see a difference in how students or staff perceive and receive their authority.

**Question 12: Please describe some of the approaches you use in decision making and problem solving.**

The female administrators in this district each listed multiple problem solving strategies they use when making decisions as administrators. Their common responses are listed below.

- Collaboration (13)
- Research the problem (7)
- Involve stakeholders (4)
- Take your time (4)
- Conflict resolution/mediation (4)
- Communication (3)
- Use experience (2)
- Committee/Team approach (2)
- Individual (2)

Other problem solving approaches that were provided by the female administrators that they used as individuals were: be open-minded, take nothing personally, look at the options, seek a “win-win” solution, compromise, let people own their own problems, shut “my” mouth, stay neutral, keep school culture in mind, be proactive, use solution-focussed problem solving, rationalize problems, check with supervisors, and use mentors for advice.

The strategies that women in this district identify as being ones they use in solving problems are strongly correlated to the strengths that they identified themselves as having in question number six. Because so many of the subjects consider one of their greatest personal qualities to be their relationships with people in their schools, it is no surprise that their most common method of solving problems is to use a form of collaboration. Many of their other responses are also relationship-focussed: talking to mentors for advise, seeking a “win-win” solution, using conflict resolution skills, involving stakeholders, keeping the culture of their schools in mind.

The unique methods of solving various problems are yet other areas of strength women bring to the area of school leadership. Their collaborative and caring approach can keep the lines of communication between students, staff, and parents more open and healthy than some other commonly used strategies.

**Question 13: What are some of the important life experiences you have had that facilitated your choice to become an administrator?**

Few responses were identified by more than one female administrator. Most subjects responded with multiple life experiences that assisted them in their decision to become administrators. The common responses are listed below with the corresponding number of women who gave that response in brackets. The other responses are grouped by themes following the common responses. Only one subject shared that she had no significant life experiences that facilitated her choice to become an administrator.

- Leader/mentor support/encouragement (7)

- Leadership experience (5)
- Post – graduate education (3)
- Teaching experiences (4)
- Parenting experiences (4)
- Family role models (2)
- Dissatisfaction with previous administrators (2)

Women’s support from their family was a theme that recurred throughout the responses. One woman shared that it was her family that encouraged her to go into administration while another specifically listed her relationship with husband as one of her most important life experiences. A third woman shared that it was being responsible for the family at an early age that contributed to her realization of her administrative aspirations. Another woman shared that the fact that her parents had great expectations of their child(ren) becoming independent and that gave her the confidence to move into school leadership. Finally, one woman shared that it was living with her two older brothers that prepared her to ‘survive in an “man’s world.”’

Two women talked about their experiences as single moms that facilitated their choice to become an administrator. One of them said, “Being a single mom of four kids has helped me to realize my own abilities.” Another woman said this: “Having been a single mom showed me what I was capable of. Holding leadership positions in schools and other jobs also contributed to my choice.”

Three women shared that their aspirations to serve in the area of administration came from desires within themselves. One commented that she had a “desire to improve schools.” Another woman said that her desire was to “give back”

to the community by serving it in this manner. A third woman desired to be part of the “bigger picture” that administrators are a part of.

Some women talked about the fact that encouragement from other people affirmed their desire to become an administrator. “In my first years of teaching, I worked a lot with teachers in the area of curriculum. Both my principal and superintendent strongly encouraged me to further my education and pursue a career where I could further enhance and use my skills.” Another woman shared this: “It was the principal who approached me and asked me to fill in as an admin[istrative] assistant for a period of time. It was his encouragement and belief in me as a leader which influenced my decision to continue in school administration.” A third woman said, “People have been receptive to my leadership abilities and encouraged me to pursue this direction.” One other woman put it like this: “Things just came my way – I did not seek out administration but I do enjoy most aspects of it. I guess continual support from other leaders to move on to more administrative responsibility and great mentorship [have been factors.]

Some women said that they were inspired to become administrators because of other experiences. These experiences include traveling and visiting other schools, professional development activities, personal encouragement from others and observing other leaders in action. One woman said that she was inspired specifically by the excellence she saw in her administrative colleagues and desired to emulate that excellence.



**Question 14: What factors do you feel need to change in order to help more qualified women to become educational administrators?**

Six women surveyed felt that nothing more needed to be changed in order to help more qualified women to become administrators. One other subject shared that she was not sure what factors needed to change. Most of the other subjects listed more than one factor that they feel needs to change to facilitate this upward movement of women into administrative positions. The common responses are listed below. The number in brackets denotes the number of women who responded with the same answer.

- Encourage potential female leaders (9)
- Change administrative job (3)

Within the “encouragement factor” response, women felt differently about who should do this encouraging. One felt it should be the school district; another felt that administrators, in general, need to provide this for potential female leaders. Others felt that this encouragement needed to come from men and women alike, but especially from mentors and role models in these women’s lives.

Three different women felt that the job itself needed to change in order for more women to become administrators. One suggested that there needs to be flexibility built into the job so women can spend more time with their families while they are administrators. Another felt that the time commitment needed to be lessened. The third woman simply stated that the “nature of the job” had to change.

Other factors that were listed by individual administrators were: more acceptance of women, more women need to apply, help male partners take on more

“homemaker” responsibilities, provide support to current female leaders, shift the mindset that boards and society have about women and authority, women need to change some factors in themselves, and the hiring philosophy has to change so that the best *candidate* gets the job, regardless of his or her gender.

One woman shared her optimistic point of view by saying this: “I believe in cycles. A whole generation of male admin[istrators] is retiring and there are many females ready/preparing to enter this role. The door will not close again.” Another woman expressed an opposite point of view: “School boards and society need to get out of the mindset that male authority has more clout than female authority.”

In response to this question, some women talked about their beliefs on hiring women into administrative positions just for the sake of increasing the number of females in administration. One said, “[The] philosophy needs to be to hire the best *person* for the job (regardless of sex). That way the “affirmative action” approach doesn’t backfire and people think, “She only got hired because she’s a woman and it was a woman’s turn to be in that position” or “they needed a woman on the team because there were only males there.” The “token woman” approach does nothing for proving to men that the right person with the right strengths was hired.” Another woman said something similar in her response: “Never use being female as an excuse or a reason to become an administrator. It is what skills and qualities you possess – not your gender – that truly counts.”

The support to hire the best person for the job was quite strong in some of the responses. This support is almost non-existent in the literature as the literature is still focussing on the need for balance in the numbers of female and male administrators.

But it seems that some of the women in this district feel that that particular approach works against them. A few of the women who were hired into administrative jobs are saying that they are looked down upon because they were only hired to balance the numbers, not because they were the best qualified of the applicants. Many of these women are advocating for the skills and qualities of the applicants to be examined and to count for more than the applicants' gender. This theme is also discussed in the responses to the last item on the questionnaire.

**Question 15: Do you perceive there to be a need for an increase in the number of female administrators in schools? If so, what can school districts and school leaders do to contribute to the increase in the number of women in leadership and what can they do to increase success for female administrators?**

Two women answered this question by stating that they do not perceive there to be an imbalance of female administrators in schools. Many others stated that they feel the imbalance has improved or is improving. Many women offered their thoughts on how the perceived imbalance of men and women in administration can be further rectified. The responses that were common among the women are listed below along with the number of women that actually responded with that suggestion.

- Imbalance has improved or is improving (10)
- Best *person* should be hired (not hiring women simply because of their gender) (6)
- Hire more females at the secondary level (2)

Other responses to this question were to make the administrative job less intensive, to provide opportunities and release time for women to participate in job shadowing with other administrators, build in support systems for females, identify and encourage young potential leaders, showcase teachers with administrative potential, balance genders on committees, and to be careful not to let the balance go the other direction and have more females than males.

Women also made the following statements in response to this question: “There should be equal numbers of male and female administrators.” “A balance exists within school administrative positions, but an imbalance is still present at central office.” “Quality [of female administrators] not quantity is what will move us forward.” “I see the need for caring, competent, committed and capable individuals of both genders at all levels of education.”

Some women’s responses focussed on the theme identified in question number fourteen of hiring the best applicant for the job. “If all districts were able to see past the male and female factor and hire the best *candidate*, it may become less of a big deal when a women is hired or when a woman is *not* hired.” Another woman said, “I do not believe there should be an increase in the number of female administrators simply for number’s sake. The best person for the job should be chosen even if there are no females.”

A few of the responses centered more on a perceived need for more women in school leadership roles. “There is an under representation of women in principalships, especially given the proportionate numbers of women in schools. Better representation in assistants’ positions is a strong start, as is a women’s role on

most admin[istrative] teams. Our district's admin[istrators]' PD [professional development] focus on growth, supervision, and evaluation should have a spin-off effect on creating a supportive culture for all, including women administrators.”

Another woman replied with this comment: “Yes, there should be an equal number of male and female administrators in schools. School leaders need to balance committees [and] showcase teachers in their schools who show initiative, and encourage women to move into administration.”

One woman commented on how the situation for females has consistently improved over the last eleven years and makes this closing optimistic statement about this particular district: “If strong educators apply for admin[istration] I believe they are hired based on qualifications not on gender.”

## Chapter Six

### Conclusions

#### Possible Solutions for a Balanced Future

Marshall (1985) suggests that *all* candidates who wish to be successful in advancing into administrative positions must do the following:

1. develop a district-wide perspective
2. develop an ability to manage community groups
3. demonstrate the ability to manage conflict, legal mandates, discipline, and finance
4. get the attention of the superiors
5. joke comfortably with others
6. develop an image of loyalty to the system
7. develop a leadership style which conforms to the organisational norm

Women, however, tended to have difficulty with a number of these criteria simply because of their gender (Marshall, 1985). Because women possess a contrasting style of accomplishing many of the above suggestions, they are not recognised for the unique perspective they create. As a result, women have difficulty gaining access to relevant political and social groups and, therefore, cannot readily demonstrate their administrative attributes to their superiors. Sexual issues, as identified by men, clouded the motivation and manner in which women tried to get attention from their superiors. Even though no sexual motivation existed on the part of the women, some men thought that this was their intent. The women were

also judged by their male counterparts as not having an appropriate leadership style. These suggestions are appropriate ones and can be used for the benefit of women, by women, if they are aware of the possible pitfalls to avoid.

The continued education of men and women with regard to gender imbalances, and the possible reasons behind them, can also help in rectifying the situation. “Women experience the world around them differently than men; but men are mainly unaware of these differences because men are the more powerful group in society, and the more powerful need not remain steadfastly aware of the realities of the less powerful” (Gougeon, 1992, p. 17). Then let us keep making them aware of the situation and continue to teach them about how we, as women, do see, and experience, the world. We must continue to strive to understand the differences between males and females, and learn to communicate effectively and appropriately with one another (Gougeon, 1992).

One of the key determinants of women’s status has been the division of labour around the issue of childcare. This role has traditionally been the woman’s responsibility to oversee. This belief is so embedded in our culture that female teachers are still occupying themselves in mainly educating the children of the younger grades. The more that men participate in childcare, and the more that women are free from child-rearing responsibilities, the higher women’s status tends to be (Kimmel, 2000). Therefore, men need to be more affirmed by women, as well as other men, in their ability to raise children, and women need to value the father’s contributions more.

Kimmel (2000, p. 197) makes the following suggestions for remedying workplace inequality:

1. change the application of the existing laws to reflect comparable worth and pay equity
2. eliminate the discrimination that occurs towards women who take time off to get pregnant, have children and raise them
3. create policies in the work place that allow for on-site child care, flexible working hours, and parental leave so that parents can more effectively balance work and life.

It is evident that women have come some distance in their pursuit of equality in all aspects of society. It is also evident, however, that we have much further to go. We need to continue to talk amongst ourselves as women and educate one another about the fact that the situation is not a hopeless one. But we must also talk, and learn, with the men of our culture. We must choose to work along side of men, not against them, as we attain this goal. In fact, if we are to be successful, we need our male counterparts to support us and help us make the necessary changes for the advancement of the equality of women.

The entire concept of who women are and what they do, must change in society as a whole. The stereotypes currently in place must be examined and discarded, if necessary, so women will be free to pursue their desires in their lives and their careers. "Women must be valued for the skills and talents they bring to administration rather than being compared to traditional concepts of administration. Until school administration is seen as a woman's rightful place, the sunroof will only



slide back to admit a few and the glass ceiling will not be broken” (Gill, cited in Reynolds & Young, 1995, p. 60-61.)

Ten deterrents for women to be promoted into administrative positions, as identified in 1992 by the Federation of Women Teacher’s Association of Ontario (FWTAO), were listed earlier in this paper. Each of these obstacles may have a remedy. Family responsibilities exist for each woman, whether she has children or not. But what is it about this fact that creates the perception in society that if she has a family that she cannot become an administrator? Most women have many commitments in their lives, yet none of *those* commitments is listed as a major obstacle for women trying to move into administrative positions. Yes, women can be wonderful wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends and *still* be administrators – even great ones!

Male networks are listed as a second deterrent. Male networks do exist, but so do female networks. Men may argue that female networks are hard for them to break into. Networking is all about communicating and women are, according to the research and this study, good communicators. Communication is the key to “breaking into” existing network structures.

Administration has a political component. I would argue that teaching also has a political component, as does being a member of a family. Women can and do function very well in a variety of political situations and administration is no different. The “political nature of the job” is a characteristic that women encounter as human beings and have learned how to manoeuvre within those parameters on a daily basis. They can, therefore, learn the administrative polity, as well.

There is potential for women to feel isolated in administration. But as women learn to connect with each other, regardless of the level of administration they are serving in, this isolation will diminish. The isolation will also decrease as women and men learn to “network” with each other.

Difference in salary between males and females is not an issue in the education system within the Province of Alberta. Certainly if salary differentials exist, lobbying for equal payment for equal work must continue. Women and men must get paid the same amount of money for doing the same job in educational administration.

The nature of the job as an administrator is that of many long hours. But as family commitments become more equally shared amongst men and women, perhaps this deterrent will lessen. Also, as some of the participants in my study pointed out, we should examine and, if possible, change the nature of the job to make it less time-intensive for all administrators.

Women have much stamina. They have the stamina to “do the job” of being an administrator. But they are not always *perceived* as having that stamina because of the other commitments they also have. This perception lends itself to another one: women are not yet ready to become administrators. Sometimes women also feel they are not ready. Women who desire administrative positions need to tell others of their own interest and learn as much about the job as they can. This fortitude will demonstrate their stamina, interest, and readiness to take on the extra challenges that can accompany an administrative position.

Many women have doubts about their own abilities to be administrators. These doubts were identified in the research and in my study as “internal factors.” But as has also been seen in both the research and in my study, words and actions of encouragement and support from superiors, colleagues, friends, and family have great impact on women. Mentorship, both formal and informal, is a remedy to this deterrent.

### Concluding Thoughts

The topic of women in administration is a special one to me. I grew up always wanting to be a teacher as an adult. But the thought of becoming an administrator did not occur to me until I was in my fifth year of my teaching career. Perhaps this is because I never knew of a female school administrator until I was working on my undergraduate degree at university. My road to administration was not the “typical” one. My first administrative position was at a secondary school, not an elementary one like I had anticipated. Like many of the women in my study, I connected with females in similar positions both inside and outside of our school district. But unlike some of the women in my study, I have had strong support from both my male and female colleagues.

The women who participated in my study certainly helped to give strength to the female voice in administration as they shared their stories and thoughts with me. Some of their responses correlated with what the research says about females and school leadership, some of their responses did not match the research at all, and still other responses had little research to compare the results with.

Some of the major themes that I found that matched the research were many of the barriers that the women encountered in their quest to become administrators, their reasons for desiring administrative positions, the qualities and characteristics that the women feel they bring to administration, their support systems, and their techniques in solving problems.

Not all of the women's responses corresponded with the literature. Some of the answers they gave to the question of why they wanted to become an administrator were not readily found in the literature. For example, women's self-confidence is most often listed as an internal factor that keeps them from moving into a position of school leadership. But some women listed their confidence as a reason to become an administrator. Also, the concept of supporting staff to make their lives easier is not a common reason women list for going into administration, according to the research. However, 15% of the women in this study listed "supporting teachers" as one of the reasons for going into administration.

The fact that 35% of the women in my study said that they encountered no obstacles as they fulfilled their desire to become an administrator, is a strong contradiction to the research. This district appears to be an anomaly in this particular area. But the barriers that they did list, do match much of what the research already tells us.

A theme that recurred in the last two items of the questionnaire is an almost completely foreign one to the current research, and yet 30% of the subjects discussed it: hire the best candidate for the job, regardless of gender. The notion that hiring women just for the sake of increasing the number of females is not something that

many of the participants support. Many of the subjects want to see a woman hired because of her qualities and skills so that her colleagues can identify with *those* reasons rather than her sex.

The results from this study have confirmed that women are more than qualified to serve as school administrators. They bring with them unique perspectives and skills in dealing with relationships with staff, students and parents, and issues in their buildings. They possess the knowledge, skills, and attributes that are necessary to continue to lead schools and to make positive differences in them. Perhaps one day in the near future women will be “rendered the very best” along with their male counterparts, as Plato desired so many years ago.

I have been an administrator for four years. Although I thoroughly enjoy my job and the challenges it brings, I have had some bumps along the road. My motive for becoming an administrator was to make a positive difference in the lives of students in an entire school, after making differences in the lives of the students in my classes. Proving to others that I was capable of successfully carrying out my responsibilities as an administrator was an obstacle earlier in my career. But my love for people, sense of humor, hard work, and determination have carried me through. I have been supported and encouraged by male and female colleagues, family, and friends along the way.

As a female administrator, I have, like my female counterparts, encountered some obstacles both on my journey to become an educational administrator and in serving as one. But I, too, have been encouraged not only by the number of women that have been hired in our district into administrative positions, but also by the

*quality* of them. I look forward to the day when gender is not a measuring tool (perceived or real) as new administrators are hired in any school district.

### Implications for Future Research

As I identified earlier in this study, there are some areas in this topic of “women in administration” that are not yet well researched. One area that I found difficult to compare my results to was the concept of male and female authority. Further study of the perceptions of the differences between male and female authority would be of great benefit. How do students view male and female authority? What factors cause students to view these authority genders differently (if they do)? What makes adults respond to different gender authorities the way they do? Is there anything women can do to overcome the viewpoints that see them as “less” of an authority in schools?

Another area that could be researched further is the difficulties female administrators have doing their job that they attribute to their gender. The women in this study shared that they had problems with both male and female colleagues, parents and/or students. What other conflicts do female administrators have that they attribute to their gender? Do these difficulties occur more with a female administrator of a certain personality? What can females do to prevent experiencing these difficulties?

The topic of “women in administration” will continue to be studied and analyzed for years to come. This study has confirmed much of what the research says is typical of women seeking to be, or currently in, school administrative

positions. But the contradictions present in this information also raise some interesting questions. Are times, practices, and beliefs about female administrators changing or is this particular district unique? Because of the caliber of women this particular district employs, it will be of no surprise to me when they continue to move up the hierarchical ladder of educational administration in this district and beyond.

Our district, like all districts, should be nurturing, inclusive, and equitable regardless of gender. We have a good beginning toward change and must remain committed to that goal.

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